

## Readiness of Religious Communities to Live Today and Tomorrow. Do Consecrated Persons Take Seriously Contemporary Theological, Social and Environmental Challenges?

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### Abstract

Consecrated life is an ongoing phenomenon within the Catholic Church that changes over time and tries to respond to actual spiritual and social needs of the society. This study deals with the contemporary religious order communities facing the rapid development of society and changed theological emphases. The aim is to assess whether consecrated persons are ready to accept socio-cultural changes and respond to actual spiritual, theological, social, and environmental challenges. This readiness is an essential prerequisite if religious orders are to remain an integral part of the Church and society in the future, as they have been since the beginning of the development of Christianised Europe. After a brief outlining of historical context, using the basic statistical analysis, two groups of consecrated persons with different cultural-political backgrounds are compared, in order to find out to what extent they subjectively feel to fit in with the contemporary world and how familiar they are with the current magisterial documents. In the last section, the latest magisterial documents addressed to consecrated persons are analysed to determine whether religious order members are sufficiently theoretically equipped to integrate the current social changes theologically and practically. The results show a higher degree of integrity with contemporary society among Western religious order members compared to those from the former Czechoslovakia, as well as a varying degree of familiarity with individual documents. The theoretical basis provided by Magisterial documents for renewal of consecrated life was found sufficient, while the practical implications, the ability of individual institutes to undergo a balanced reform, as well as the overall attractiveness of consecrated life for the younger generations remain an open question.

**Keywords:** consecrated life, magisterial documents, social challenges, environmental issues, renewal, theological accents

## Methodological Introduction

This study deals with the phenomenon of the contemporary consecrated life raising the question whether religious orders, that, for sixteen centuries, in many regards have influenced the development of European civilisation and stood at the beginning of many socio-cultural changes, still have a place in the present and future generations of the highly secularised Euro-American society. The paper outlines the situation of religious order communities in connection with the changing character of society and the changing theological accents of the Magisterium from three different points of view. Therefore, several methodological approaches are combined in the text.

In the first chapter, the theme is anchored historically. After a brief outline of the contribution of religious orders to European society over the centuries, the impact of Vatican II on consecrated life is described, followed by a short introduction of the development of religious institutes in the post-conciliar era in view of the differing conditions and situations in a world divided by the Iron Curtain. The second and third chapters deal with 'mental presence' of consecrated persons (CPs) in today's world. First, it is examined to what extent CPs feel they fit in with the contemporary world, meant in the general sense of a globalised, pluralised, accelerated, and advanced secularised world. Then, the study investigates CPs' orientation in the current teaching of the Church, both in general and specifically with regard to the mission and role of consecrated life within the Church. In these chapters, we work with partial results of an international religious-communities survey carried out under the auspices of the Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology of the Palacky University in Olomouc in the period 2020-2021. In the interpretation, the quantitative data and results of the basic statistical analysis are supplemented with observations of the author, who knows well the milieu of religious institutes. Despite the use of statistical data, this is not a quantitative study and the discussion is not separated from the description of the results, but the two are intertwined. The fourth chapter is based on direct work with Magisterial documents addressed to CPs during the pontificate of Pope Francis. Methodologically, a descriptive analysis of text parts is used, anchoring them in a broader context. We draw attention to specific texts and examine the emphasis on the engagement of CPs in social and environmental issues, in particular in dealing with various forms of poverty. However, we do not work systematically with the reflection of these documents in the literature because they have not yet found much resonance amongst academics and it would exceed both the objectives and the scope of this study.

The main aim of the paper is to assess whether consecrated persons are ready to accept socio-cultural changes, to respond to actual spiritual, theological, social, and environmental challenges, and to adapt in order to continue in future generations. We also set sub-objectives in the form of answers to four research questions: 1. Does the perception of belonging to the contemporary world differ between the CPs in the two countries of the former Czechoslovakia and the CPs from the Western Euro-American world? 2. Is it possible to trace parallels between which Magisterial documents CPs in both groups preferentially read and how they perceive their belonging to the outside world? 3. To what extent are social and environmental issues doctrinally anchored in contemporary Church documents addressed to CPs? 4. Does the current Church's teaching on consecrated life provide a sufficient and complex basis to enable religious communities to adapt to a rapidly changing socio-cultural context of an advanced secularised society and to continue in future generations? Further, our secondary aim is to outline the possibilities of an interdisciplinary approach to a topic that has so far been treated by Czech experts mainly historically.

## 1. Easterly and Westerly from the Iron Curtain: a Brief look at the Development of Religious Communities in Recent Decades

Consecrated life has played an important civilisational role in the Christian culture since its inception at the end of antiquity. It was not only the significant participation of the monks in the Christianisation of Europe, but also their contribution to the cultivation of the countryside and the development of agriculture. Moreover, medieval monasteries were practically the only centres of education and artistic creation until the establishment of universities and town schools.<sup>1</sup> In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the mendicant orders laid the foundations for social-charitable work, folk preaching, and systematic theological-philosophical reflection at universities.<sup>2</sup> In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Jesuits revolutionised not only the experiencing of Christian spirituality, but also the educational system and missionary work.<sup>3</sup> Since the end of the same century, the first more loosely organised congregations appeared, responding to the pressing problems in society, especially poverty and lack of education among lower social classes. The strict post-Tridentine development slowed down this spontaneous growth of 'pious associations' by imposing a monastic way of life and a strict cloister on many of them, which has caused deformative processes that are still evident in many religious institutes today.<sup>4</sup> After the decline and efforts partially or completely to liquidate religious life during the Enlightenment reforms and revolutionary events at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a renaissance of consecrated life started a few decades later in the form of religious congregations, mostly women's, which sprang up in dozens in Europe and overseas. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the social commitment of consecrated persons was fully manifested as these nuns opened, on a large scale, educational, social, and health facilities that other institutions were not able to implement at that time. As in previous centuries, but to a much greater extent, consecrated life once again became popular and attractive to young Christians.<sup>5</sup> This era of the 'golden age' of religious congregations culminated in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was definitively ended by the paradigmatic changes of the 1960s, which included also the convocation of Vatican II. This council marked a new milestone in the sixteen-century-old history of religious life and started the transformation which is still in progress. The result remains open and evokes questions of whether consecrated life still has a place in a changed society, whether it can be attractive to younger generations and what new social roles it should play. In order to assess the current situation and future perspectives, it is necessary to understand the development of religious order communities over the last few decades, which, moreover, has not been the same everywhere but influenced by various socio-political conditions of particular countries and regions. In the last century, the world has undergone the most dramatic changes in human history, and the pace of development is constantly accelerating. It is becoming increasingly difficult to be familiar not only with new technologies and communication media, but also with the thinking and experiences of younger generations. Although the Catholic Church officially gave the green light to openness, adaptability to the socio-cultural environment and *aggiornamento* sixty years ago at Vatican II, the implementation of the Council's teaching is a very gradual and complex matter. In essence, this teaching represents a radical 'Copernican turn' in the Catholic Christian's view of the world. After centuries, this turning point restores authority to the Gospel proclamation of a loving incarnated

1 Leonard Holtz, *Geschichte des christlichen Ordenslebens* (Zürich: Benziger, 1991), 68-78.

2 Ibid., 121-138.

3 Ines G. Županov (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

4 Mary T. Malone, *Women and Christianity. From the Reformation to the 21st Century* (Dublin: Orbis Books, 2003), 94-103.

5 Tomáš Petráček, *Sekularizace a katolicismus v českých zemích. Specifické rysy české cesty od lidové církve k nejeateističtější zemi světa* (Ostrava: Moravapress, 2013), 49-58.



God who came ‘not to judge the world, but to save it’ (John 12:47). Understanding the nature of this turn requires a change of mentality in several ways: from exclusivity to identification (cf. Phil 2:6-8), from isolation to going out involvement (cf. Matt 28:19), and from rule-bound to inner freedom (cf. Gal 5:18). In this spirit, for six decades, Magisterial documents have appealed to today’s disciples to recall both the universality of God’s love for all people and the mission of Christians to show the world what Jesus meant with the words he used to define himself against heartless moralism and legalism: ‘I want mercy not sacrifice’ (Matt 9:13). The mission of Jesus’ disciples to be the salt of the earth we walk on and the light of the world of which we are a part (cf. Matt 5:13-14) is a fundamental element of contemporary theology.

The process of *aggiornamento* and change of mentality takes place within the universal Church at different paces and in various modifications, with the socio-cultural and political context playing a significant role. The Council specifically ordered renewal for religious institutes.<sup>6</sup> The hierarchically governed communities, which arose at a certain stage of the historical development of the Church and humanity, were strongly marked by theological deformations of the ‘Forgotten Trinity Period’. The practice resulting from this theology developed the form of an authoritarian and pyramidally ordered society.<sup>7</sup> Right here, the three characteristics mentioned above could be observed to a particularly concentrated extent: the feeling of exclusivity, closure from the outside world, and being bound by rules.<sup>8</sup> For CPs, the conciliar turn meant a revolution that shook the existing order holding these institutions and relativised an interpretation of values they held sacred and inviolable. Changing the collective mentality of a closed community is always a complex process that rarely follows a unified line. Therefore, the post-conciliar renewal of religious institutes is a very complicated and long-term process with a still unclear outcome.

It is known that events in religious communities in the first decades after the end of Vatican II were very turbulent, at least in the free world west of the Iron Curtain. Many institutes have undergone radical changes that have entailed a departure from established traditions, rethinking the role of superiors, new styles of dressing (from simplifying the religious habit to discarding it altogether), opening the communities to greater participation in work among people.<sup>9</sup> However, there were also some negative factors: departure of a significant number of members, grouping in values and questions about the meaning and mission of consecrated life in the ‘new’ world.<sup>10</sup> Another phenomenon of the change in the social and ecclesiastical paradigm was the fact that religious life ceased to be attractive for young Christians. From the 1970s onwards, most communities in the Western Euro-American civilisation began to suffer from a lack of new vocations.<sup>11</sup> Religious institutes began to age and some even die out, while others focused on establishing provinces in Third World countries where it was easy to recruit new members.<sup>12</sup>

6 *Perfectae Caritatis. The Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life* (28<sup>th</sup> October 1965).

7 Cf. Ctirad Václav Pospíšil, *Jako v nebi, tak i na zemi. Náčrt trinitární teologie* (Praha: Krystal OP – Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2007), 53-81.

8 Dana Jakšičová and Miroslav Novotný, *Služebníci pod zákonem. Zlatý věk řeholních kongregací v českobudějovické diecézi* (České Budějovice: Jihočeské muzeum, 2021), 233-352.

9 Judith Harford and Tom O’Donoghue, ‘Continuity and change in the perspectives of women religious in Ireland on themselves both as religious and as teachers in the years immediately prior to, and following, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)’, *Paedagogica Historica* 47 (2011): 399-413; Susan O. Michelman, ‘Changing old habits: Dress of women religious and its relationship to personal and social identity’, *Sociological inquiry* 67 (1997): 350-363.

10 Veronica Garcia-Martin, ‘Crossroads of Identities in Women Religious in Spain. Catholicism, Society and Second Vatican Council (1953-69)’, *Journal of Religious History* 47, no. 3 (September 2023): 469-485.

11 Helen Rose Ebaugh et al., ‘The growth and decline of the population of Catholic nuns cross-nationally, 1960-1990: A case of secularization as social structural change’, *Journal for the scientific study of religion* (1996): 171-183.

12 Gertrud Huwelmeier, ‘Our future will be in India: Travelling Nuns between Europe and South Asia’, *Migration and Religion in Europe: Comparative Perspectives on South Asian Experiences* (2014): 45-57; Isabelle Jonveaux, ‘Future of Catholic Monasteries on New Monastic

The situation of religious communities in Czechoslovakia and other countries of the Soviet bloc differed considerably from that of the Western world. The Council's 'news' was delayed and censored. Their implementation was greatly hindered or even prevented by the communist regime, which kept CPs under strict control and did not allow them to develop freely and accept new young members.<sup>13</sup> Women's communities especially lived detached from the majority society in the spirit of traditions and legalistic concept of religious life. In many communities, post-conciliar required change has been put into practice only partially. The outlived structures became even more rigid during the persecution and a change of mentality in the spirit of free development was not possible under these circumstances, even from a psychological point of view. The exceptions were individuals from different religious institutes, more often men than women, who, as secret CPs or priests, sometimes connected to the underground church,<sup>14</sup> managed to join the majority society. Daily interaction with the outside world at least partially saved them from adopting unhealthy attitudes of the inhabitants of centralising monasteries and asylums, in which CPs worked under the supervision of state authorities.<sup>15</sup>

Today, the differences in the mentality and situation of religious communities in the countries of the East and the West are therefore not only predictable, but also noticeable without much examination. Western institutes prevalently appear to be older in age, as the crisis of vocation began there as early as in the mid-1960s.<sup>16</sup> Religious communities in Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, experienced a brief period of influx of new members in the 1990s after the fall of communism, as the long-suppressed and forbidden way of life became attractive once again. However, around the year 2000, this trend began to wane, probably not only due to a general change in the social paradigm, but also with the declining popularity of the Catholic Church, which failed to use the potential and broad support it enjoyed in the first years after the fall of the totalitarian regime.<sup>17</sup> Vatican II, with its call for openness and going out to people, was and is reflected here only slowly and in a certain way, selectively. Therefore, ecclesiastical institutions, including religious communities, rather tended to return to traditional structures and an attitude of exclusivity. It is evident that this tension still exists and concerns the whole universal Church, but it takes on different dynamics in different countries and socio-cultural contexts.<sup>18</sup>

The post-conciliar renewal of consecrated life is not a finished process. On the contrary, it is a topical one. Since the end of the Council, the Magisterium of the Catholic Church has continuously commented on the role of consecrated life and has called CPs to live an authentic life in a personal relationship with God, fraternal community and personal freedom, and to come out of isolation into the 'streets of today's world'.<sup>19</sup> In particular, the pontificate of Pope Francis, who is himself a religious, is characterised by his appeal to CPs, both in a series of documents and in personal meetings. A very important text of the recent period is the *New Wine in New Wineskins* by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) which openly names issues that have persisted in the communities for more than half a century since the

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Continents: The Case of Africa, *Religions* 10/9 (2019): 513.

13 Jiří Hanuš and Stanislav Balík, *Letnice dvacátého století: druhý vatikánský koncil a české země* (Brno: CDK, 2012), 7-24.

14 Cf. Petr Fiala and Jiří Hanuš, *Skrytá církev: Felix M. Davídek a společenství Koinótés* (Brno: CDK, 2022).

15 Vojtěch Vlček (ed.), *Ženské řehole za komunismu 1948-1989* (Olomouc: Matice Cyrilometodějská, 2003).

16 H. R. Ebaugh, 'The growth and decline,' 174.

17 J. O'Mahony, 'The Catholic Church and civil society: Democratic options in the post-Communist Czech Republic,' *West European Politics* 26 (2003): 183; Tomáš Petráček, *Sekularizace a katolicismus*, 105-106.

18 For a recent analysis of contemporary consecrated life and religious vocations across continents, including challenges for the future, cf. Patricia Wittberg et al., *God's Call Is Everywhere. A Global Analysis of Contemporary Religious Vocations for Women* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2023).

19 Cf. below.

conclusion of the Council.<sup>20</sup> This document confirms that both the individual communities and the institutionalised consecrated life as a whole are going through a period of crisis and transformation.

## 2. Consecrated Persons – a Part of Today’s Society?

The actual situation of religious communities and its connectedness to a broader socio-cultural context was the impetus for a research project called ‘Consecrated Life Today’ which focused on the interconnection of the physical, mental, and spiritual health of CPs and some aspects of community life. The questionnaire was first spread among CPs in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (CZ/SK) with 401 respondents, and then translated into four languages and sent to religious communities in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, USA, UK, Spain, and Italy. Spanish communities did not participate. From the other countries, 338 answers were returned (157 in English, 109 in German, 72 in Italian). Thus, there are two similarly large samples of respondents that can be compared with each other: CPs from CZ/SK and CPs from selected Western countries (SWC) that did not go through a totalitarian regime and persecution of the Catholic Church in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Given the nature of the sample, it is necessary to take into account its unrepresentativeness and expected biases caused by several factors, especially the significant age difference and the predominance of respondents with higher education (see Table 1). Moreover, it is necessary to consider the fact of general distrust and reticence towards research questionnaires, since many institutes refused to participate. It can be assumed that the overall more open communities participated because the superiors passed the questionnaire on to the other members to complete. On the contrary, the participation of rather conservative institutes with authoritarian leadership is very unlikely. Further, the nature of the sample may have been influenced by similar responses from members of the same communities. The data therefore requires careful interpretation, but it is still very valuable. Especially in the case of data from CZ/SK communities, the sample is quite numerous and to a large extent represents the younger and middle generation of CPs in CZ/SK.

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of the samples

|                | Sample 1<br>(CZ/SK) |      | Sample 2<br>(SWC) |      |
|----------------|---------------------|------|-------------------|------|
| Characteristic | n                   | %    | n                 | %    |
| <b>Gender</b>  |                     |      |                   |      |
| Male           | 85                  | 21.2 | 50                | 14.8 |
| Female         | 316                 | 78.8 | 288               | 85.2 |
| <b>Age</b>     |                     |      |                   |      |
| 18-30          | 16                  | 4.0  | 2                 | 0.6  |
| 31-40          | 60                  | 15.0 | 17                | 5.0  |
| 41-50          | 188                 | 46.9 | 34                | 10.1 |
| 51-60          | 98                  | 24.4 | 59                | 17.5 |
| 61-70          | 37                  | 9.2  | 58                | 17.2 |
| 71-92          | 2                   | 0.5  | 168               | 49.7 |

| Education                    |     |      |     |      |
|------------------------------|-----|------|-----|------|
| Elementary                   | 1   | 0.2  | 0   | 0.0  |
| Secondary vocational         | 13  | 3.2  | 14  | 4.2  |
| Secondary with graduation    | 48  | 12.0 | 17  | 5.0  |
| Higher + bachelor            | 45  | 11.2 | 93  | 27.5 |
| University (Mag., Ing., Dr.) | 294 | 73.4 | 214 | 63.3 |
| Total                        | 401 |      | 338 |      |

One of the aspects targeted by the research is the ‘mental presence’ of CPs in today’s world. First, it is examined to what extent CPs subjectively identify with the contemporary world, in the broad and unspecified sense of this term. Then, their orientation in the current teaching of the Church is investigated, both in general and with regard to the specific mission and role of consecrated life within the Church. We suppose that an internal reform of a Church institution and its adaptation to the changed paradigm is not possible without knowledge of current theology and a re-evaluation of older theological interpretations on which the institution was based at the time of its founding.

One survey question was: ‘To what extent do you as a consecrated person fit in with the contemporary world?’ The respondents chose from four possible answers: ‘totally, rather yes, rather not, not at all’. The resulting responses of the two examined samples show obvious deviations. The p-value represents a comparison of CPs groups from CZ/SK and SWC using the chi-square test. It was found that there is a statistically significant correlation between the country of origin of CPs and how much they feel to be part of today’s world. More than a third of Western CPs said they fully fit into the contemporary world, and more than half of them perceive that they ‘rather fit in’. Negative responses were rare in this sample. From the CZ/SK sample, only 12 % feel to fit in fully while more than half of the respondents decided for a more neutral ‘rather yes’. More than a quarter of respondents chose negative answers.

Table 2: Answers to the question: To what extent do you as a consecrated person fit in with the contemporary world?

|       | totally |      | rather yes |      | rather not |      | not at all |     | p-value    |
|-------|---------|------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|-----|------------|
|       | n       | %    | n          | %    | n          | %    | n          | %   | P<0.001*** |
| CZ/SK | 43      | 12.0 | 221        | 61.9 | 82         | 23.0 | 11         | 3.1 |            |
| SWC   | 112     | 35.0 | 180        | 56.3 | 26         | 8.1  | 2          | 0.6 |            |

The answers more or less correspond to what has been said above about the development of religious institutes in the two compared areas in the last six decades. It is not very surprising that among CPs in SWC, the perceived sense of belonging to the world outside their institute is higher than in the case of CPs in CZ/SK. Certainly, this result may not apply universally, for there are different currents in consecrated life in the Western world, and the responses of closed, more conservative communities are not available. However, with reference to a certain ‘religious mainstream’ represented by the International Union Superiors General (UISG) and its activities



including the published *UISG Bulletin*,<sup>21</sup> it can be argued that CPs in SWC systematically seek to reflect on current social and theological themes and to draw from them impulses for consecrated life. This effort to keep up with current events can foster a sense of belonging of CPs to the majority society.

Another factor, which can influence how CPs subjectively perceive the degree of their 'fitting in' to the society, is the religious habit. A large number of CPs in Western countries do not currently wear religious habits and are not immediately distinguishable as a 'special group'. On the contrary, in CZ/SK, the habit is a characteristic feature of most religious sisters (less so of religious brothers), so they are destined to be automatically considered a 'special group'. It is probable that a religious habit in any form plays an important role in the formation of the identity of CPs and their integration into the majority society.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, a lower sense of belonging to contemporary society among CPs in CZ/SK may be partly caused by the awareness of the differences between the outside world and the microcosm of the religious community which often uses its own language and represents attitudes still bearing traces of the pre-conciliar exclusivity of the religious state.<sup>23</sup> However, in the fact that more than 60% of CZ/SK respondents stated that they 'rather fit' into the contemporary world, it is also possible to see their effort and desire for change. Even a negative assessment of the degree of fitting into contemporary society, at least for some respondents, can be interpreted more like a call for change and a criticism of the current state of religious communities than a rejection of the outside world. Nevertheless, this possible interpretation of the results is only a hypothesis based on experience of the community environment and informal discussions among CPs.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. Consecrated Persons and Knowledge of Magisterial Documents

As mentioned above, the internal reform of a Church institution and its adaptation to a changed paradigm is not possible without knowledge of current theology and a rethinking of older theological interpretations. Vatican II gave special attention to the reform of consecrated life in the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*. Since then, the popes and CICLSAL have issued various types of documents addressed to CPs. In particular, the pontificate of the Jesuit Pope Francis is characterised by this. Today, there are a number of magisterial texts anchoring the theology of consecrated life in the Gospel foundation, in following the personal example of Jesus in relation to God and people, in living fraternal communion, and in missionary openness. However, the question remains to what extent these documents are accessible to members of religious communities and what the motivation and willingness is among CPs to read and take seriously these texts.

For the purpose of the questionnaire, ten texts were selected. Six of these are magisterial documents on consecrated life: the above mentioned *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965), the extensive post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II *Vita Consecrata* (1996), the Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium* (2002), two letters published by CICLSAL in preparation for the Year of Consecrated Life *Rejoice* (2014) and *Scrutinize*

21 *UISG Bulletin* is published three times a year in the digital format and is available in seven languages: <https://www.uisg.org/en/bulletin/>. The journal is intended for general superiors and other UISG members and offers various reflections on religious life in an effort to contribute to a better knowledge of consecrated life and its development worldwide.

22 Michelman, 'Changing old habits'.

23 Jakšičová and Novotný, *Služebníci*, 371.

24 A great desire for change was expressed by Czech religious sisters at the seminar 'Living Religious Vows and Synodality in the Context of the Challenges of Contemporary Society' in October 2023. Kateřina Štastná, 'Řeholnice z celého Česka se setkaly v Praze pod Petřínem', *Katolické noviny* 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023, <http://katolickenoviny.cz/2023/10/reholnice-z-celeho-ceska-se-setkaly-v-praze-pod-petrinem>.



(2014), and finally the guidelines *New Wine in New Wineskins* (2017). Further, three major encyclicals of Pope Francis were included in which he raises important evangelisation, social, and environmental issues: *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), *Laudato Si'* (2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (2020). The last title, *The Strength of Vocation. Consecrated Life Today* (2019), is not an official Church document, but an interview between Pope Francis and Fernando Prado CMF on the topic of contemporary consecrated life. The respondents answered two questions: 1. Have you heard of the title? 2. Have you read it? Table 3 shows the 'popularity' of the selected documents among CPs in both compared samples. In Table 4, the Western CPs are divided into separate language groups.

Table 3: Knowledge of Church Documents – Comparison CZ/SK vs. SWC

|                                 | CZ/SK |      | SWC |      | p-value   |
|---------------------------------|-------|------|-----|------|-----------|
|                                 | n     | %    | n   | %    |           |
| <b>Heard about the document</b> |       |      |     |      |           |
| Perfectae Caritatis             | 334   | 92.5 | 270 | 82.1 | <0.001*** |
| Vita Consecrata                 | 349   | 96.7 | 244 | 74.2 | <0.001*** |
| Starting Afresh from Christ     | 274   | 75.9 | 106 | 32.2 | <0.001*** |
| Rejoice                         | 230   | 63.7 | 137 | 41.6 | <0.001*** |
| Scrutinize                      | 139   | 38.5 | 69  | 21.0 | <0.001*** |
| New Wine in New Wineskins       | 237   | 65.7 | 205 | 62.3 | n.s.      |
| The Strength of a Vocation      | 122   | 33.8 | 109 | 33.1 | n.s.      |
| Evangelii Gaudium               | 311   | 86.1 | 277 | 84.2 | n.s.      |
| Laudato Si'                     | 307   | 85.0 | 321 | 97.6 | <0.001*** |
| Fratelli Tutti                  | 272   | 75.3 | 300 | 91.2 | <0.001*** |
| <b>Read the document</b>        |       |      |     |      |           |
| Perfectae Caritatis             | 286   | 79.2 | 210 | 63.8 | <0.001*** |
| Vita Consecrata                 | 330   | 91.4 | 201 | 61.1 | <0.001*** |
| Starting Afresh from Christ     | 233   | 64.5 | 88  | 27.6 | <0.001*** |
| Rejoice                         | 156   | 43.2 | 97  | 29.5 | <0.001*** |
| Scrutinize                      | 102   | 28.3 | 53  | 16.1 | <0.001*** |
| New Wine in New Wineskins       | 172   | 47.6 | 148 | 45.0 | n.s.      |
| The Strength of a Vocation      | 81    | 22.4 | 61  | 18.5 | n.s.      |
| Evangelii Gaudium               | 215   | 59.6 | 224 | 68.1 | 0.020*    |
| Laudato Si'                     | 159   | 44.0 | 295 | 89.7 | <0.001*** |
| Fratelli Tutti                  | 93    | 25.8 | 249 | 75.7 | <0.001*** |

Comparing the two samples, using a chi-square test, it was found that for some items there was a statistically significant difference between the country of origin of CPs and the responders' knowledge of particular documents. Except for *New Wine in New Wineskins*, *The Strength of a Vocation* and *Evangelii Gaudium*, where no statistically significant difference was shown, for all

other titles a highly significant statistical difference was found between the country of origin and whether they know about and read the documents.

Table 4: Knowledge of Church Documents – Comparison of Answers in English, German and Italian

|                                 | ENG |      | GE |      | IT |       | p-value   |
|---------------------------------|-----|------|----|------|----|-------|-----------|
|                                 | n   | %    | n  | %    | n  | %     |           |
| <b>Heard about the document</b> |     |      |    |      |    |       |           |
| Perfectae Caritatis             | 120 | 76.4 | 81 | 74.3 | 69 | 95.8  | <0.001*** |
| Vita Consecrata                 | 91  | 58.0 | 82 | 75.2 | 71 | 98.6  | <0.001*** |
| Starting Afresh from Christ     | 22  | 14.0 | 24 | 22.0 | 60 | 83.3  | <0.001*** |
| Rejoice                         | 42  | 26.8 | 34 | 31.2 | 61 | 84.7  | <0.001*** |
| Scrutinize                      | 3   | 1.9  | 16 | 14.7 | 50 | 69.4  | <0.001*** |
| New Wine in New Wineskins       | 95  | 60.5 | 48 | 44.0 | 62 | 86.1  | <0.001*** |
| The Strength of a Vocation      | 46  | 29.3 | 33 | 30.3 | 30 | 41.7  | n.s.      |
| Evangelii Gaudium               | 113 | 72.0 | 93 | 85.3 | 71 | 98.6  | <0.001*** |
| Laudato Si'                     | 150 | 95.5 | 99 | 90.8 | 72 | 100.0 | <0.020*   |
| Fratelli Tutti                  | 141 | 89.8 | 90 | 82.6 | 69 | 95.8  | <0.019*   |
| <b>Read the document</b>        |     |      |    |      |    |       |           |
| Perfectae Caritatis             | 91  | 58.0 | 67 | 61.5 | 53 | 72.2  | n.s.      |
| Vita Consecrata                 | 71  | 45.2 | 67 | 61.5 | 63 | 87.5  | <0.001*** |
| Starting Afresh from Christ     | 21  | 13.4 | 16 | 14.7 | 51 | 70.8  | <0.001*** |
| Rejoice                         | 27  | 17.2 | 18 | 16.5 | 52 | 72.2  | <0.001*** |
| Scrutinize                      | 3   | 1.9  | 13 | 11.9 | 37 | 51.4  | <0.001*** |
| New Wine in New Wineskins       | 65  | 41.4 | 27 | 24.8 | 56 | 77.8  | <0.001*** |
| The Strength of a Vocation      | 25  | 15.9 | 18 | 16.5 | 18 | 25.0  | n.s.      |
| Evangelii Gaudium               | 89  | 56.7 | 69 | 63.3 | 66 | 91.7  | <0.001*** |
| Laudato Si'                     | 143 | 91.1 | 86 | 78.9 | 66 | 91.7  | <0.006**  |
| Fratelli Tutti                  | 123 | 78.3 | 58 | 53.2 | 68 | 94.4  | <0.001*** |

Furthermore, the comparison of individual language groups of the 'Western' sample in Table 4 also showed noticeable differences. Using a chi-square test, it was found that except for *The Strength of a Vocation* in hearing about and *Perfectae Caritatis* and *The Strength of a Vocation* in reading, there was a statistically significant difference between the language groups.

Tables 3 and 4 show several interesting findings. Striking is the clear dominance of the popularity of *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti* among CPs in SWC, of which knowledge of them is higher than that of *Perfectae Caritatis* and *Vita Consecrata*, which are key but older texts of the post-conciliar renewal of consecrated life. In CZ/SK, on the contrary, these latter two documents dominate. *Vita Consecrata* was commonly used in religious formation here at the turn of the millennium, and the responses, representing mostly the middle generation of CPs in CZ/SK, testify that most

of them have read this somewhat lengthy and rather abstract text, unlike many CPs in the West. In the US in particular, this document has apparently become much less widespread. Even more forgotten here was the Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ*, which was widely spread in CZ/SK in its time. Awareness of *Perfectae Caritatis* as a conciliar text is generally high. Of the texts for the Year of Consecrated Life, the first letter *Rejoice* is much better known, while *Scrutinize* has rather remained unnoticed, maybe because of its length, but perhaps especially because more texts were published at the same time. Overall, materials for the Year of Consecrated Life became more popular in CZ/SK than in the English and German-speaking countries. Further, it is striking that Italian CPs are more familiar with the documents than all other groups studied. In addition to being ‘at home at the source’, there is also some bias in the available data to take into account, as the sample is quite small and most of the responses come from one large community. It is probable that not all Italian communities reach this level. The knowledge of *New Wine in New Wineskins* is overall between 40-50%, while it remained less widespread in the German-speaking environment. Since it clearly names the problems faced by religious institutes across continents and calls for change in specific outdated and unhealthy practices, its distribution among CPs seems to be insufficient. The book of interviews *The Strength of a Vocation* has not become very popular. Further, it is interesting that among the great encyclicals of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* is the best known in the CZ/SK environment, while in SWC it is only in third place after *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti*. The low readership of *Fratelli Tutti* in CZ/SK may be partly caused by a small time-gap between the publication of this encyclical and the data collection because data in SWC was collected a few months later. However, the reception of *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti* among CPs in CZ/SK is significantly lower than among CPs in SWC.

The results correspond to the author’s own experience, according to which slightly different theological accents in the two groups of CPs can be observed; however, they have not as yet received scientific confirmation. Western CPs seem to be strongly influenced by the integral theology of Pope Francis and are accustomed to thinking in terms of eco-spirituality<sup>25</sup> or eco-theology of religious vows.<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, in CZ/SK, the focus on the interpretation of religious vows and the role of consecrated life through speculative Trinitology and Christology (represented, for example, in *Vita Consecrata*) is more prevalent. These theological speculations also have their practical implications and challenges for CPs, but they are more difficult to understand and lack the clarity and simplicity of the Gospel message to which Pope Francis’ encyclicals seek to return. As a result, consecrated life can appear as a complicated theological construct, which weakens its flexibility and adaptability. We venture to state that this complexity of theological interpretations, accompanied by strict regulations and a label of a special group within the universal Church, has largely ‘tied the hands’ of CPs and predefined their point of view, which is not always easy to reconsider. Religious institutes in CZ/SK clearly lack a quarter of a century of free development after Vatican II. For this period, a spontaneity of searching and questioning was typical, accompanied by making mistakes and learning lessons from them.<sup>27</sup> Further, new theological approaches were developed at that time, which influenced the concept of consecrated life. While these approaches such as integral theology or eco-theology were prevalently accepted by communities west of the Iron Curtain already several decades ago,<sup>28</sup> eastern communities are still learning about them.

25 For example, Robert E. Shore-Goss, *God Is Green: An Eco-Spirituality of Incarnate Compassion* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016).

26 This approach is currently being discussed and expertly theologically processed by Gemma Simmonds CJ. Some sub-topics appear in UISG Bulletin and are reflected at gatherings of some religious institutes, however, without available outputs yet.

27 Veronica Garcia-Martin, ‘Crossroads of Identities’.

28 For example, Joan Chittister, *The Fire in these Ashes. A Spirituality of Contemporary Religious Life* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995).

Therefore, Pope Francis' calls to go out into the streets of today's world and the concept of integral theology seem to be accepted by the majority of CPs in CZ/SK with approval and willingness, yet with a certain reticence and less radicalism, mostly due to previous firmly established schemes and ideas about religious life. This is even more apparent in attempts to apply eco-theology to consecrated life, for prejudice and mistrust are encountered caused by ignorance of the actual content of the terminology.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. The Social and Environmental Challenges from Magisterium to Consecrated Persons

The social dimension of the CP's mission has been present in the post-conciliar teaching of the Church from the beginning. Over six decades, there has been a growing emphasis on this, culminating so far in the pontificate of Pope Francis.<sup>30</sup> The environmental aspect has only emerged in recent years in connection with the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

Consecrated life has become one of the central emphases of the Jesuit Pope Bergoglio. CPs are confronted with the challenges that the Pope imposes on the universal Church, and are reminded of their specific mission resulting from these general challenges. In addition to his social encyclicals, which have found a considerable response among CPs,<sup>31</sup> an unprecedented number of texts have been addressed to CPs in recent years, both by Pope Francis and by CICLSAL. On the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life (30/11/2014 – 2/2/2016), which was guided by the Pope's motto 'Wake up the World',<sup>32</sup> four important documents were published. Each of them, in a slightly different way, called for a courageous search for new paths for consecrated life, especially for going out to life's peripheries of all kinds, for an authentic witness of joy and for a radical expression of compassion for the poor.<sup>33</sup> As part of this search and reassessment, religious institutes were given the following task by the Pope: to look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion, and to embrace the future with hope.<sup>34</sup> The central and easy-to-read theological starting point of Francis' view of consecrated life is the authentic witness of an encounter with God and a life of close personal relationship with him, which manifests itself in an unpretentious

29 Many Czech sisters heard about the eco-theology of religious vows for the first time at the seminar 'Living Religious Vows and Synodality in the Context of the Challenges of Contemporary Society' by Gemma Simmonds CJ in October 2023. Cf. Georgina Clarson, *A Synod within the Synod* (6. 11. 2023); <https://www.infantjesussisters.org/post/a-synod-within-the-synod>.

30 Cf. Paul VI, "Evangelica Testificatio. On the Renewal of the Religious Life, Apostolic exhortation from 29. 6. 1971," In *Zasvěcený život ve světle reformy II. Vatikánského koncilu* (Olomouc: Matice cyrilometodějská, 1997), 17-18; CICLSAL, "Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life from 31. 5. 1983," In *Zasvěcený život ve světle reformy II. Vatikánského koncilu* (Olomouc: Matice cyrilometodějská, 1997), 36-37; CICLSAL, "Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor", 2. 2. 1994, In *Zasvěcený život ve světle reformy II. Vatikánského koncilu* (Olomouc: Matice cyrilometodějská, 1997), 63; John Paul II, "Vita Consecrata, Apostolic exhortation from 25. 3. 1996," In *Zasvěcený život ve světle reformy II. Vatikánského koncilu* (Olomouc: Matice cyrilometodějská, 1997), 51, 75, 82; CICLSAL, *Znovu začít od Krista. Obnovené úsilí zasvěceného života v třetím tisíciletí* (Olomouc: Matice cyrilometodějská, 2003), 36.

31 *UISG Bulletin* published many articles dealing with the consequences of these encyclicals for consecrated life. For example, Sheila Kinsey, 'UISG Campaign for the Planet: "Laudato Si" and the Way Forward. Presentation of a Commitment of the Environment', *UISG Bulletin* 169 (2019): 41-48; Fabio Baggio, 'Current Challenges for Ecclesial Communities in Light of "Fratelli Tutti"', *UISG Bulletin* 175 (2021): 11-16.

32 Cf. *Rejoice*, 10.

33 Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life from 21. 11. 2014*, Archived November 9, 2023, at [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_lettera-ap\\_20141121\\_lettera-consacrat.htm](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20141121_lettera-consacrat.htm); CICLSAL, *Rejoice. To consecrated men and women from the teachings of Pope Francis* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014); CICLSAL, *Scrutate. Ai consacrati e alle consacrate in cammino sui segni di Dio* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014); CICLSAL, *Guidelines for the Administration of the Assets in Institutes of Consecrated Life and in Societies of Apostolic Life* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2014).

34 Cf. Francis, *Apostolic Letter*, I.1 – I.3. For a brief summary of the letter and reflections on the contents, see for example Marry Kenny, 'The Year of Consecrated Life', *The Furrow* 66, no. 5 (2015): 262–266; Donal Murray, 'Glorious and Unfinished – the Year of Consecrated Life', *The Furrow* 66, no. 6 (2015): 311–319.



inner joy and availability for dedicated service. Then, consecrated life becomes attractive and has the potential to wake up the world.<sup>35</sup> The letter *Scrutinize* explains the reasons for the renewal of consecrated life, referring to its prophetic dimension and the great social encyclicals of recent decades.<sup>36</sup> Further, various tensions and the risk of ideologising the social commitment of CPs are mentioned, which Paul VI warned against at a time when these tensions were very much alive:<sup>37</sup>

Consecrated life has gone to the outskirts of the cities, making a true 'exodus' to the poor, addressing itself to the world of the abandoned. We must acknowledge exemplary generosity here, but also note that there has been no lack of tensions and risk of lapsing into ideology, above all in the first years after the Council.<sup>38</sup>

Besides the usual references to poverty and social injustice, this document lists for the first time the new pressing issues of humanity, including environmental and gender issues and globalisation:

The experience of the poor, interreligious and intercultural dialogue, the complementarity of man and woman, environmentalism in a sick world, eugenics without scruples, a globalized economy, planetary communication, symbolic language [...] These are epoch-making avenues of exploration that call into question values, languages, priorities, anthropologies. Millions of people are on a journey through worlds and civilizations, destabilizing age-old identities and fostering mixtures of cultures and religions.<sup>39</sup>

Facing these realities, CPs are challenged 'to become a welcoming dialogue partner in the search for God which has always stirred the human heart' and are confronted with the question of whether they are able 'to recognize anew the value of otherness and the ethical question of how difference may peacefully coexist'.<sup>40</sup> Then, another challenging appeal follows: not only to witness to the good, but also to be able 'to point it out, especially where it is not usually seen, amongst "non-citizens", "half-citizens", "urban remnants", those without dignity. We must move from words of solidarity to actions that welcome and heal: consecrated life is called to this truth'.<sup>41</sup>

The guideline *New Wine in New Wineskins* (2017) was largely a response to inputs that CICLSAL obtained from CPs gathered at events during the Year of Consecrated Life.<sup>42</sup> This document does not deny the great and noble challenges cited above; many of them are repeated here, but somehow brought 'back to earth' by openly naming some of the pressing issues that have long persisted in many religious institutes. These problems often make it very difficult or even impossible to live an authentically joyful witness of consecrated life. In particular, it points to the harmfulness of outdated structures, the misuse of authority, the lack of co-responsibility and dialogue, and the misconceived formation of young members.<sup>43</sup> This document reveals the apparent disparity

35 *Rejoice*, 10.

36 *Scrutinize*, 5. Ana Begić, Evanoeoskom radikalnošću živjeti poziv na svetost [To Live a Call to Holiness with an Evangelic Radicality], *Crkva u Svijetu / Church in the World* 50, no. 4 (2015): 613–631.

37 *Evangelica Testificatio*, 17.

38 *Scrutinize*, 13.

39 *Ibid.*, 15.

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.*, 16.

42 In the Year of Consecrated Life, two large international gatherings took place in Rome, one for young CPs, one for major superiors. From both meetings, inputs from workshops were handed over to CICLSAL.

43 *New Wine*, 8–10; 14–16; 19–26.

between the declared ideal and the reality of many religious communities.<sup>44</sup> Three years later, the instruction *The Gift of Fidelity and the Joy of Perseverance* tried to respond to a large number of departures from religious communities.<sup>45</sup>

In an interview with Fernando Prado, Pope Francis explained the relationship of CPs to ecology, which has not yet been explicitly addressed in official documents.

If we, as consecrated persons, lose this dimension of fraternity with all creation, we become gentrified in the socio-political sense of the word. We can end up being an aristocracy detached from universal brotherhood. For this reason, in *Laudato Si*, the poor are very important. *Laudato Si* is viewed as a green encyclical, but I would say that, first of all, it is a social encyclical. A real option for the poor is to also opt for creation. We are called to become more aware that the defense of creation is, in the end, awareness that everything is going to be done new.<sup>46</sup>

The above passage offers a clear appeal to CPs to be present in contemporary society as witnesses to an authentic Christian message. CPs are called not to shrink from reality, but to respond to it with concrete actions. Moreover, the fact that consecrated life seeks to respond to current social challenges is evidenced by the recent synodal responses of religious institutes<sup>47</sup> and by choosing the theme of the Jubilee of Consecrated Life 2025. The Jubilee motto ‘Pilgrims of Hope’ focuses on three concepts: 1. Listening to the cry of the poor, 2. The care and custody of creation, 3. In solidarity with all brothers and sisters.<sup>48</sup> The motto was chosen by Pope Francis, and Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, prefect of CICLSAL, who admitted in his letter announcing the Jubilee, that these three concepts were proposed ‘wanting to respond to the Pope’s desiderata.’<sup>49</sup> The personality of Pope Francis seems to have a significant impact on religious communities and their practical and spiritual direction. The Pope has invited CPs ‘to make the preparatory year 2024 a great symphony of prayer’<sup>50</sup> and often repeats the need to fight the spiritual worldliness which is ‘dangerous because it is a way of life that reduces spirituality to an appearance’<sup>51</sup> while disconnecting it from the Gospel. Francis’ practical challenges remain well anchored theologically, which is a characteristic feature of his integral theology. It can be concluded that, from the point of view of the official doctrine of the Church, CPs, their mission, and future direction are better taken care of than ever before. Nevertheless, it cannot be supposed that this doctrine is and will be fully embodied in the daily practice of numerous religious communities facing a serious shortage of young members who could be able to carry the renewed mission of consecrated life. Moreover, there is a great demand on CPs to develop this mission in a community environment that promotes inner freedom, personal spirituality, and fraternal relationships in order to become attractive enough for current and future young Christians. Therefore, it is

44 Wittberg, *God’s Call*, Foreword.

45 CICLSAL, *The Gift of Fidelity and the Joy of Perseverance*, Instructions (2. 2. 2020). Using the experiences of individuals, various motives for departing religious institutes are analysed in Wittberg et al., *God’s Call*.

46 Pope Francis and Fernando Prado, *The Strength of a Vocation: Consecrated Life Today* (US Bishops Conference, 2018), 99-100.

47 With reference to the lecture given by Gemma Simmonds CJ at the seminar ‘Living Religious Vows and Synodality in the Context of the Challenges of Contemporary Society’ in Prague, October 20<sup>th</sup> 2023. Cf. Clarson, *A Synod within the Synod*.

48 The Jubilee of Consecrated Life will take place in Rome 8-12th October 2025. The preparatory stage has been in progress since July 2023 led by the motto ‘Thirst for Reconciliation’. Cf. Joao Braz Card. de Aviz, *Letter to all members of consecrated life from 29th June 2023*. Archived October 15, 2023 at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/letters/2022/documents/20220211-fisichella-giubileo2025.html>.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Francis, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Priests of the Diocese of Rome* (5. 8. 2023), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2023/documents/20230805-lettera-sacerdoti.html>.

predictable that the number of religious order communities will continue to decrease in the future and only those will remain that manage to reach out to the younger generation.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

This study examines the relationship of contemporary religious communities to society and the current challenges facing humanity, and tries to assess whether consecrated life has a potential to adapt and to continue for generations to come. Institutes of consecrated life, to some extent, form closed communities within the universal Church and have undergone a long period of development in a completely different historical paradigm. Therefore, it is supposed that it is not easy for them to adapt to rapidly changing socio-cultural conditions, especially the advancing secularisation and pluralism of views and values, and to rethink theological approaches so that they can be attractive to young people once again. After a brief outline of the historical development, we focused on two groups of CPs from geographically different milieu to determine whether the cultural-political setting of the state influenced the self-conception of CPs in relation to the majority society. Further, this text deals with the magisterial documents addressed to CPs, and their distribution in religious communities. Finally, based on a cursory analysis of documents, it is examined to what extent the current Pope and the Magisterium support the social and environmental commitment of CPs and what role in the today's and future society is required of them.

Our research confirmed what was already assumed based on the historical context, namely that CPs from selected countries of Western Europe and from the USA subjectively perceive more that they are part of today's world than CPs from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The impact of the unfree development of the Church in communist Czechoslovakia in the first decades after Vatican II is evident. Religious institutes here were able to make only a fraction of the post-conciliar changes compared to what was moving the communities in the West at that time. With a little simplification, it can be said that many of these changes are coming to CZ/SK with a delay of that 'missed quarter of a century'. Despite the difficulties of abandoning and reevaluating the outdated structures, a large number of CPs in these two countries are open to changes and eager to live their mission better grounded both in the Gospel and in understanding of today's mentality.

This corresponds with the subsequent results. It was detected that more CPs in SWC read the great encyclicals of Pope Francis than CPs in CZ/SK, who, on the contrary, have a greater awareness of documents regarding the consecrated life. Hence, there is a greater emphasis of Western CPs on social and environmental issues, especially various forms of poverty and inequality among people. These issues are also approached openly by CPs in CZ/SK, but with less radicalism and some caution. Especially the concept of ecology is associated with various prejudices and misinterpretations in these countries.

Magisterial texts addressed to CPs from the end of Vatican II to the present days contain social themes and call for engagement in social issues. Along with the encouragement for active service among the needy, there is also a warning against the ideologisation and politicisation of social issues. The call for CPs to witness Christ's love through concrete service among the poorest has grown significantly during the pontificate of Pope Francis. At the same time, environmental challenges were added, along with a strong appeal to CPs to come out of their closed communities to social peripheries. From these accents, the theme of the upcoming Jubilee of Consecrated Life 2025 has recently emerged. In recent years, CICLSAL has also published several texts pointing to

52 Cf. Tomáš Petráček, *Sekularizace a katolicismus*, 58.

the persistent negative phenomena in religious institutes and the lack of conciliar reform. These documents call for change and set out the direction of this change, so that CPs can live their vocation truly and fully and become more inspiring for present and future generations. Thus, it can be concluded that in terms of theoretical background, CPs are well equipped to 'live today and tomorrow' and to take seriously contemporary theological, social, and environmental challenges. However, it remains open to what extent individual institutes and communities will take these challenges seriously, succeed in undergoing a healthy and balanced reform, and will be attractive enough to young Christians to compete with the many other options available to them.

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